

How to take care *of* Plants *and* Flowers



How to Take Care of
PLANTS
and
FLOWERS

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Potted plants make gardening a year-round pleasure. By attentive care in the matter of a few fundamental principles, indoor ferns and flowers can be made to yield abounding beauty even in mid-winter

PLANTS *and* FLOWERS

in the Home

HAVE you ever noticed as you go about, that some homes have an air of cozy restfulness while others, though they may be ever so beautiful, seem to leave something to be desired?

It is in growing plants and bright blossoms that we find the medium through which we can add to our dwellings that priceless charm which makes them "homes" in every sense of meaning. The time has passed when flowers in the house were a privilege enjoyed only by the well-to-do. In return for a little care and intelligent attention we may all benefit by the cheery companionship of growing greenery and gay flowers in pots or window boxes.

Success with plants is not a matter of luck—it is a matter of "knowing how." This little book is a sincere effort to aid you in the proper care of your plants and cut flowers.



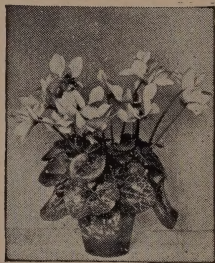
THE LIVING PLANT

REAL success with flowers in the house is based upon consideration of the fact that they are living organisms. Like human beings they breathe, eat and drink in order to live, grow and flourish.

All plants need soil in which the roots are anchored and from which part of the required food supply is drawn.

In the soil there must be water. First, because the sap is a liquid and requires water as the plant develops. Second, the necessary food cannot be absorbed through the roots nor circulated throughout the plant unless it is in liquid form. Third, through its leaves (which are the lungs of the plant) moisture is given off and water is required to replace what is lost in this way.

Pure fresh air is just as essential for the well-being of the plant as it is





for our own. Breathing through its leaves, the plant can be harmed when its air supply contains dust, gas, smoke, or other fumes.



Since it is a living organism, the plant must also be supplied with proper food in sufficient quantities. Its food is taken partly from the soil through the roots and partly from the air through tiny leaf pores. In the leaves (to which the raw food is carried by the sap) the food is acted upon by sunlight and the green matter (chlorophyl) in the leaf cells and changed into forms that the plant can use or "digest." This prepared food is carried again as part of the sap to all parts of the plant to form the tissue of stem, leaf, root, bud, flower and seed.

The plant diet includes a dozen or more kinds of food known by chemists as "elements." The most important of these foods are nitrogen, phosphorous, potassium and



calcium (lime). All of the other plant food elements are usually present in most soils in sufficient quantities but these four most important 'ones are commonly lacking to greater or less extent.

Nitrogen is especially needed for the building up of green stem and leaf tissues; Phosphorous is necessary for the formation and ripening of flower and seed; Potassium is needed to give body and strength to the plant as a whole; and Calcium (commonly called lime), though to some extent a plant food is mainly helpful in rendering the raw food material in the soil "digestible" and in keeping the soil "sweet" and wholesome.

Providing these necessary foods in the proper quantity and proportions is often a puzzling question to both the outdoor and indoor gardener. All doubts and inconvenience may be eliminated by the application of high-grade, quickly available plant food, which contains the necessary food elements correctly proportioned and in concentrated, easy to-use form.



To eat, drink and breathe these are the basis of plant life. Making it possible for these processes to continue as Nature intended they should is the only way to insure success with indoor plants. On this understanding we are ready to take up the specific points of care and general culture.

DETAILS OF CARE

CERTAIN fixed principles apply to practically all the commoner kinds of plants that are grown in pots, tubs, hanging baskets, window-boxes and other receptacles containing soil. For the sake of clearness these may be summarized as follows:

- 1 Provide a soil which is of such texture that it will not become hard and therefore difficult for the roots to penetrate. Also it should be capable of absorbing and holding a fair amount of water, and porous enough to admit some air along with the moisture.

- 2 Maintain a sufficient food supply. The amount of soil in pots, tubs, etc., is so limited that its fertility is soon exhausted. To meet this condition, keep the plant supplied with food by using a concentrated fertilizer that can be worked into the soil or dissolved and applied in liquid form. Once a month is often enough for this; too frequent feeding will cause "indigestion" and probably failure.
- 3 Neither allow the soil to become bone dry nor soggy. If the pot makes a hollow ringing sound when struck with the knuckles the soil is dry and needs water. Do not try to keep the soil loose as in the garden. You cannot prevent evaporation, so instead give plenty of water.
- 4 Provide proper drainage by placing in the bottom of every pot some small stones, cinders, or pieces of broken pottery, which will prevent the hole from becoming clogged with soil. Never put a plant in any container which has no bottom hole for the escape of surplus water.



- 5 Where pots are kept standing in saucers or trays it is advisable to place a layer of pebbles between them and the pot. This keeps the bottom of



- the pot out of the excess moisture; the surplus moisture evaporating will help keep the air around the plants moist.
- 6 Freshen the foliage now and then by sprinkling with clear water—never with liquid fertilizer. In the case of ivy, palms, dracaenas and other foliage plants, give the leaves an occasional sponging with slightly soapy water followed by a thorough rinsing with clear water.
- 7 Keep the plants where they can get plenty of direct daylight and, if possible, at least an hour of actual sunlight each day.
- 8 Try to give them some fresh air daily but protect them from sudden drafts or low temperatures (under 55 degrees F.).



On particularly cold nights move them back from the window or cover them with paper cones.

- 9 Do not place plants close to registers or radiators. Too much heat (temperatures above 75 degrees F.) can do as much damage as too little.
- 10 Protect them from fumes of cooking, from gas, or oil stoves or lamps, and from furnace gases.
- 11 Especially during the winter when the heat is on and the air indoors is dry, keep a dish of water near the plants so as to provide some atmospheric moisture.
- 12 When a flowering plant stops blooming, stop watering it and let it rest for a few weeks in a dim, cool (not cold) place. Then prune it back, repot it, water well and start it into growth again. Plants that have bloomed for Easter can be set out in a half shady corner of the garden (without being removed from their pots) as soon as the weather becomes warm. Leave them there till September.



- 13 Ferns and other foliage plants do not require rest or pruning but they can also be "plunged" in the garden over the summer as just described. Indoors they need the same general care, with rather more water and a spraying with clear water every couple of weeks to keep their foliage bright and clean.
- 14 When the roots of a plant begin to come through the hole in the bottom of the pot (and also after a flowering plant has been rested and cut back) it should be repotted. First remove it, dirt and all, from the old pot, then loosen and remove the hard soil from the root ball. Provide new, fertilized soil and a pot of the same size or, at most one size larger. Put an inch of drainage material in the bottom and a little soil, then set the plant in about as deep as it stood before. Sift in the new soil and firm it thoroughly. Water well, preferably by setting the pot in a pan of water and allowing the soil to drink up all it will.



- 15 A plant newly dug from the garden and "potted up" (or one just repotted) should not, at first, be heavily watered, fertilized, put in a bright sunny window or otherwise forced into growth. The best plan is to sink the pot in a slightly shaded corner of the garden for a week or two, then bring it indoors and gradually bring it to a position where it will receive direct daylight and some sunlight every day. Abrupt changes of temperature or of light conditions should always be avoided, for plants are much more





sensitive to them than most people realize. Furthermore, their effects may be decidedly serious, especially in the case of plants indoors.

- 16 The commonest insect pests on house plants are the small lice or aphids, the small round or wooly scale insects, and the tiny "red spiders" which are really mites. All these can usually be washed off and destroyed with a strong fine spray of plain water. Where this treatment fails use soap suds or a spray of nicotine or oil solutions.
- 17 Before using an old pot a second time, scrub it with hot water and cleaning powder and rinse thoroughly. Fungus troubles sometimes live over on dirty old flower pots.

**FORCING
BULBS
INDOORS** **B**ULBS are easily forced into flower indoors in winter and early spring either in water alone (Hyacinths and Paper-white Narcissus) or in pots of good loamy

soil or prepared fiber (Crocuses, Tulips, Narcissus, Hyacinths, and Lily-of-the-Valley). Bulbs, if not planted immediately after they are received, should be kept cool and dry.



After planting bulbs in pots stand these in a cold frame or other shaded place outdoors until after freezing weather arrives. Then bring them into the house as wanted, gradually getting them used to the indoor heat. Keep the soil moist but not wet.

When the bulbs are to be grown in water, place the glasses and bowls in a dark cool place for three to six weeks after planting. When the roots are well developed and the tops begin to grow, bring them into the heat and light and they will flower a few weeks



later. Keep water around the roots but not high enough so it will reach and rot the bulbs.

When a bulb has bloomed, let it dry off (ripen) for a month or more. It may then be planted outdoors where, after a season or two, it will probably flower again. Forced bulbs cannot satisfactorily be forced a second time until they have been grown outdoors for two or three years.

THE CARE SOF FAR we have been
OF CUT talking entirely about
FLOWERS complete plants—plants
with roots. To finish
our story something must

be said about the care of cut blossoms. Cut flowers while not growing plants are nevertheless alive and can be kept bright and fresh longer if they are properly cared for. The petals and





leaves continue to give off moisture brought to them through the stem. As there are no longer roots to secure this moisture, it must be taken up through the cut end of the stem.

This explains why flowers droop when kept out of water, exposed to the drying action of the air. The important points in caring for cut flowers are these:

- 1 When flowers are purchased as a gift to others, leave them undisturbed in the original package and keep them in a cool place (preferably the refrigerator) until time to present them.
- 2 When flowers are cut or received from the florist, plunge their stems at once, deep into cold water and leave them in a cool, dark place for half an hour or more. They should then be arranged loosely in tall vases or in bowls holding plenty of water, taking care not to place them too close to windows or radiators.
- 3 Remove any leaves that would be under water; otherwise they will decay and become offensive.

- 4 Change the water in the vases at least every other day. When changing, clip an inch off each stem and, with large woody stems, slit them for half an inch.
- 5 Keep flower vases clean—this is very important. Immediately after removing faded flowers, wash the vase thoroughly and rinse with scalding water.
- 6 Sprinkle foliage and blossoms lightly with cool, fresh water each morning.
- 7 At night (in winter) remove flowers to a cool place such as a pantry or cellar where there is no open window.
- 8 Table centerpiece arrangements will last longer if kept covered with large glass bowls between meals.
- 9 There is good experimental evidence that certain substances, dissolved in the water in the vases will prolong the life of cut flowers. In using such substances, the directions that come with them should be closely followed.
- 10 Corsages, boutonnieres and other cut flower arrangements designed to be worn

should be left in their original wrappings until needed. Keep the package unopened in the ice chest or other cool place.

The foregoing pages are not the entire story of house plants and their care, but they do embody all of the essential principles involved. By following the instructions and profiting by experience one will quickly win a degree of success which will encourage more exhaustive study of the subject and create a desire to grow some of the more unusual plants which call for special treatment.



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